

REPORT  
OF THE  
PHYSICIAN  
OF THE  
NEW-YORK  
*LUNATIC ASYLUM,*

ADDRESSED TO A  
COMMITTEE OF ITS GOVERNORS,

AND  
PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST

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*To Thomas Franklin, Jacob Sherred, and  
Cornelius Dubois, Esquires, chairman,  
and members of the committee of the  
New-York Lunatic Asylum.*

GENTLEMEN,

AS your monthly records exhibit regular returns of the patients, and you have by long and assiduous attention become familiar with the management of the asylum and its dependencies, it can hardly be expected, that under a more general view of the institution, I shall be able to add to your knowledge of its important interests. But as with the privilege of your example, and of co-operating with you in your benevolent design, there cannot, it is hoped, be any misconception of the motives which govern me, I beg leave to lay before you, in the form of tables, a statement of cases admitted from the 13th of September last to this date,

(a period of eight months) with their results, and of others received prior to that month, and within the same time discharged ; referring you, for a more particular account, to the accompanying volume, which contains their histories, in so far as it has been practicable to obtain them, and their medical treatment. I shall take the liberty to add some general observations on lunatic asylums, and on the treatment of insanity, having an exclusive reference to the comfort, convenience, and cure of the unfortunate persons labouring under that most awful malady.

The number of admissions in the period referred to, is thirty-eight, of which twenty-eight were males, and ten females. Of the former, there have been discharged cured, thirteen, improved three ; two by request, and two have died. Of the eight remaining in the house, four are much improved, three have been recently admitted, and one is a man sixty-eight years of age, labouring under that species of insanity, which sometimes occurs in advanced life, from a diminution of perception and memory, and is termed *amentia senilis*. It is to be observed,

that T. H. who, on the 25th of October, was entered on the minutes of the committee as relieved only, was discharged cured. Of the ten female patients, one has been discharged cured, one an improper object, three by request, and one has died. Of the remaining four, one was admitted the 18th, one the 27th of March, one the 24th of April, one the 12th instant ; and they are all nearly in the state in which they came in. During the time stated, of patients who were in the house previous to the first of September, there have been cured one male, and one female ; four males and one female have died, three males and two females have been discharged by request, and one male as an improper object ; the females and two of the males, improved. The cases which ended fatally were of long standing, connected with palsy, epilepsy, consumption and dropsy.

The whole number cured since the 13th of September, is fourteen, twelve of whom were males, and two females. In the same time, there have been relieved, and much improved, five ; discharged by request, twelve ; as improper objects, two ; and eight have died.

The number of patients now in the house is seventy-seven, of whom forty-nine are males, and twenty-eight females. Fourteen males, and nine females are variously and usefully employed in such occupations as appear to be the best adapted to their several cases, deriving in this manner, more benefit perhaps, than the establishment, under its present arrangements, could otherwise afford them.

It is desirable that early measures should be taken to discharge C. H. whose case you are acquainted with, and to enable him to return to his connections in Scotland, who, I am informed, are respectable people. His confinement appears to have a tendency to revive, and it may perpetuate the disorder from which he is fast recovering, and which, for its entire cure, may require nothing but his enlargement. Should he, from his present restraint, unfortunately relapse into the dreadful state in which he was admitted, it is not difficult to foretel to what a series of painful reflections so deplorable an event would give rise.

W. M. a custom house patient, as he is called, labouring under palsy, is an improper

object of our attention. The means adapted to his cure, would be more advantageously applied in the hospital.

There are several old cases of both sexes in the house, of whose recovery there exists but a faint probability ; and there are others in a course of improvement.

Accompanying the tables of cases, is a list of names, showing, annexed to each, as nearly perhaps as the difficulty and obscurity of the subject admits, their supposed causes. How far such an exposition may or may not be useful, it is not pretended to determine. I shall hazard one remark on the occasion, that religious terror, arising from erroneous perceptions, is much more frequently the effect than a cause of mental derangement.

It will be evident to you, that from any pharmaceutical course that has been pursued in the treatment of our patients, there is but little to boast. Medicine indeed, has been rarely given, except when strongly indicated by such symptoms of bodily disease, as were supposed instrumental in exciting, or had been connected with the disorder of the mind. Under such circumstances chiefly,



do we rely on its efficacy : but we do not believe in the specific power of any drug in curing madness. Although mercury has been given to a number of our patients, there is but one instance in which it was considered that the recovery was the result of its use, and that was the case of J. L. G. discharged the 31st of March.

Mild cathartics, and warm bathing, have long appeared to me of more general utility than any other means employed as physical agents, in the treatment of insanity, and the latter, in an especial manner, in melancholic cases. Drastic purges, unless when particularly demanded, have been of far less benefit.

Blood-letting, judiciously used, in violent paroxysms, has on many occasions been of great efficacy, but is of far less general application than is often supposed ; and, without the most accurate discrimination, will be productive of much mischief. So far as I have been able to judge, local bleeding, as it is termed, has not that advantage over the general operation, as to justify the trouble of performing it ; and I am almost led to pronounce it a more than useless resort.



in cases of mental disorder. Very ample experience does not dispose me to think more favourably of setons in the neck.

Blistering the head, the back of the neck, or between the shoulders, has also been of doubtful effect; and more dependence has been placed on the same operation on remoter parts.

In three old cases, the actual cautery has been applied in its fullest extent, to the head, in the manner proposed and practised by Monsieur Valentin, a French surgeon, of reputation, as I am told; and although succeeded by exfoliations of the outer table of the scull, the result has not justified a repetition of so severe a remedy.

As a means of temporary mitigation, under a furious paroxysm, accompanied by strong arterial action and increased heat, the shower bath has been usefully applied. Though it is not to be supposed that any case of madness is to be removed by its operation, as has often occurred in certain states of febrile disease, much advantage may be derived from its proper application.

The means of safe keeping by bars and bolts, and cords and chains, are abundant,

and easily obtained; but it should be the supreme object of those who have assumed the responsibility of governing the insane, to restore to their reason, and to society, the greatest possible number of these afflicted beings: and we have no hesitation in believing, that this will be the most certainly accomplished by strict attention to a moral regimen. The greatest improvements in the treatment of madness have been of this nature; and the most approved physical agents of modern times were familiar to our remotest ancestors. With such views, the recovery of the deranged is not to be forgotten in the mazes of abstract research, nor in those wild speculations on the nature of the reasoning faculty, under the influence of which, it is often difficult to determine, where the greatest degree of mental alienation exists, whether in the patient, or in him who has the care of him.

The order and internal economy and government of the New-York Lunatic Asylum, have justly placed it in the highest rank among the best institutions of our country; and the most improved establishments of the kind in Europe, do not afford a source of

higher congratulation on the benefits they have afforded to the most afflicted of our race. The period is not remote, when a variety of circumstances conspired to render the very name of a mad house a subject of terror and dismay. The prevailing opinion of the friends of its unhappy tenants was, that they were placed within its walls, not as in a situation, where they might, by lenity and kind treatment, be restored to the blessings of health and reason, but as in a place of safe keeping, disabled from injuring themselves and others ; where, from the supposed nature of their disorder, they neither deserved, nor would receive the compassion of their keepers, and where they would inevitably languish and die. Thanks to the wisdom and humanity of the times in which we live, lunatic asylums have not only excited the attention of the benevolent every where, but have also been a subject of legislative investigation in one of the most enlightened countries of Europe. It was on inquiry discovered in England, that the contributions which had been made with a liberal hand towards their support, both in town and country, were shamefully misapplied, and

lavished on those, who, by neglect and cruelty, had merited and received the severest reprehensions of an abused public. Under their former structure, every thing that met the view of the exiled sufferer, about to enter them, was suited to convey the idea of confinement and restraint, and that he was to be immured in, and subject to the hardships of a prison; an impression of lasting and pernicious tendency. He was indeed there shut up from the world, separated from his friends, and covered from the light of day; and, amidst the aggravated horrors of a dungeon, the chains which rivetted his ghastly figure to the ground, bound also in everlasting night, the distinguishing attribute of his being. In such a situation, without an effort to revive the suspended energies of his mind, with nothing to awaken him to a sense of his human nature, without a ray of consolation, of affection, or of sympathy to beam upon him, he remained a neglected, forgotten, and abandoned prisoner. Thus forlorn, the whole plan and system of his custody, were of a nature to drive him to despair, and to the hopeless, the awful condition of irremediable madness.

Asylums for the insane ought no longer to be viewed as places of personal security merely, but the temporary abode of a class of fellow beings, having the strongest claims to our sympathy and regard ; furnished with the means of comfort, amusement, and employment, adapted to the circumstances of their condition, and the nature of their disease.

In the superior and general superintendence of such an institution, I would take the liberty to recommend, for the most obvious reasons, permanency of appointment, when justified by the qualifications of the elected. The appointed should be reasonable, humane, moral and religious, possessing stability and dignity of character ; mild and gentle in their temper and deportment, but resolute in their purposes, and of great self command ; never attempting by ill directed efforts of superior strength, to subdue the unconscious violence of their charge ; of just and sagacious observation, and endued with clear and unclouded minds ; so compassionate, and of such intelligence, as not only to take an interest in the unhappy lot of the objects of their trust, but to be able to assist them in the recovery of their reason.

In their ordinary visits, they should approach the insane with an air of gentleness and kindness, expressive of concern for their unhappy condition, a deportment, which will not fail to augment their respect and confidence, on occasions requiring a more stern and distant intercourse. They should watch, with discriminating and unwearied attention, those favourable moments of drawing them from their hallucinations, their fantasies and wanderings, which frequently occur in the intermissions of many cases, both of madness and melancholy. The blunders of the ignorant and unskilful in the treatment of bodily disease, are generally of rapid effect, and may soon end in the death of their victim ; but in the management of the insane, they are of slow, deep, and lasting consequence.

In the arrangement and structure of the asylum now erecting, whether as connected with this house, or as a separate establishment, I beg leave to suggest, that while it is of much importance that it be so constructed as to convey no idea but that of comfort, it may also admit of a classification of the patients during the day, according to their sexes, condition of life, and va-



rious states of derangement, in separate apartments of convenient dimensions. This is an object of such moment, that although requiring an additional number of attendants, appears to be deserving of serious consideration; and it is confidently believed, that its advantages would amply repay any additional expence which might arise from a variation of form. It is also recommended, that a distinct building be provided for the most raving and noisy, who should be constantly under the inspection of a faithful, humane and discreet attendant.

A convalescent should at all times be separated from the more insane. While permitted to see in the countenances and conduct of those who are around him, multiplied examples of the deplorable state from which he is emerging, what can be more adapted to overthrow his feeble and yet tottering intellect?

The furious maniac, who from occasional, but remote acts of violence, may have required the most rigid restraint, ought at times to be released from his chain and his cell; to be led forth to the refreshing influence of an untainted air, and the liberty of



such exercise, as may promote so free and equal a circulation, as shall counteract that morbid structure and disorganization, whatever their nature, which confirm and prolong his disease, and finally render it incurable. When released, it is advised that he should not associate with the deranged, but continue under the eye of an attendant, both capable and willing to improve every advantage of his meliorated condition. It is only by thus extending the freedom of the violent, that we can ascertain the changes their malady may have undergone. Neglect in performing so imperious a duty, is a negative act of unpardonable cruelty, which, there are strong reasons to believe, has often doomed to immeasurable suffering, many a wretched inmate of a lunatic asylum. What must be the feelings of that being, who, month after month, and year after year, fettered with chains, and shut up in darkness, yet possessing the powers of intellect, is incapable of rousing the sympathy of his keepers, and can contemplate in the grave only, the termination of his suffering? With what an aggravated sense of horror must we view his forsaken condition, if at the

same time, he is cut off from the cheering light and consolations of the Gospel, the blessed refuge of the afflicted? It is stated, that at the house of correction at Kendal in England, a maniac, who had lucid intervals of nine or ten months duration, was confined in a solitary cell for ten whole years, without occupation, and without seeing a human being but those who brought him food.

In the arrangements of the new asylum, it is presumed that considerable advantage would be derived from an exclusive appropriation of two large apartments for the sick of the two sexes, having allowed to each an attendant, who should remain with them during the night as well as the day. With such a provision, the sufferer, in whose mind the light of reason had been long extinguished, might, during that gleam of intellect, which frequently attends the closing scene of life, be made to know that he is a human being, meriting and receiving the compassion and kind offices of his fellows. Without such accommodation, many do, and must unavoidably die unseen.

There is perhaps nothing of more real importance to the comfort and recovery of

the sick and insane, as respects the internal provisions of the house, than a plentiful supply of water. At this establishment, some difficulty and delay have attended the prescriptions for tepid bathing, an application not only of great utility in many cases of mental disorder, but essential also for washing and purifying the skin, and promoting that cleanliness which is so necessary to health, as well as comfort, in every situation. Where the quantity of this most necessary article is abundant, conveniences, under the usual calls of nature, may be so constructed and arranged in some of the apartments, and especially in those of the sick, as that their contents may be removed by a stream of water, conveyed by pipes in the walls of the building, passing constantly through them.

It appears to me that the marble floor of the hall of the basement story of this house, without possessing any particular advantage from its material, produces a degree of dampness, not only uncomfortable, but hurtful to the persons who daily occupy it in our colder seasons.

The expediency, propriety, and utility, of public worship, cannot be too strongly in-

culcated, under proper regulations and restrictions, in every building appropriated to the reception of persons labouring under mental disease.

With respect to the amusements and various occupations of the deranged, as a means of arresting their wanderings, and thereby contributing to their recovery, many useful remarks may be found in some of the publications on insanity. I would recommend, that in all their recreations, whether of labour, of skill, or amusement, they should be separated from each other, and classed, as far as circumstances will admit, with the sane, engaged in similar amusements and pursuits. It has been found that such employments and recreations as require the most bodily exertion, have been the most beneficial.

It is submitted to the committee, if a full supply of the succulent vegetables of the season, would not be a reasonable, as it is considered a proper and salutary indulgence, to the patients of this institution.

I cannot, Gentlemen, close this long report, without an apology for so great a trespass on your time, and expressing to you my high sense of the support afforded me

in the arduous duties of my appointment, as well by your example, as by a prompt acquiescence in the means which have been occasionally proposed for the benefit and comfort of the patients of the asylum. For your uniform tokens of personal respect and kindness, I beg you to receive my warmest acknowledgments.

To Mr. Wilson, the superintendent, I am much indebted for his faithful attendance, and ready co-operation with me under the various circumstances in which his services have been required. To Doctor Joshua Fisher, for his able assistance in every department of duty claiming my attention, we are under the highest obligations; and for the polite and friendly aid, on various emergencies, of Doctor Campbell, the house physician, I cannot adequately express my thankfulness: and it is with no ordinary emotions that I acknowledge the respectful civilities of the superior and subordinate officers generally, of the New-York Hospital.

I am with much respect,

GENTLEMEN, your obliged,

and obedient servant

WILLIAM HANDY.

Asylum 15th May, 1818.

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